

x Ag 7

x Pers 2 AG STEVENSON

x Pers 1 Max LERNER

Wolf Pack

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The political life is a perilous one. You might think that after proving himself a hardy warrior in the open encounter with Valerian Zoln at the UN, Adlai Stevenson would have deserved well of the American people. But no such thing.

Several weeks ago he was the target of an attack by Sen. Goldwater, who called him soft on the Russians and clamored for his dismissal. Now he is the target of a Saturday Evening Post article by two journalists who travel close to the Presidential entourage—Stewart Alsop and Charles Bartlett—and they too (as reporters) call him soft on the Russians during the earlier phase of the Cuban crisis, and hint he is on his way out of his UN job.

From the Presidential spokesmen there are the inevitable denials, but they will not drown out the sounds of the attack. With the first blood drawn the wolf pack is in full pursuit. The head of state, even in a powerful democracy, is bound to have some of the trappings of kingship. The intrigue around him is always palace intrigue, and even the gossip of the palace guard is worth heeding, especially when similar gossip in the case of Chester Bowles was confirmed by the event.

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Alsop and Bartlett confidently report that Stevenson alone remained out of step with the "Excomm" group—the executive committee of the National Security Council—which made the daily collective decisions during the Cuban crisis and is now making them for the world political war as a whole. Stevenson flatly denies the crucial elements of the indictment—the proposal for an exchange of bases, the opposition to the military phase of the blockade—and calls the story as a whole poor reporting. I have no pipelines that enable me to judge who is right and who wrong in this exchange.

But one thing I do know. Something more is at stake here than the job fate of a man called Adlai Stevenson, who has missed the Presidency for good but securely carved his own particular niche in our history. Whether Stevenson stays or goes as UN Ambassador will do little to affect history's verdict on the kind of man he has been. But the manner of his being pushed out—if indeed he is pushed out—affects the functioning of Excomm itself, which has emerged as the most important decision-making institution of contemporary America.

Consider what is at stake. There are nine men in Excomm—the President, his brother Robert, Rusk, McNamara, Dillon, Gen. Taylor, McConc, Bundy, Sorensen along with some irregulars (Acheson, Lovett, McCloy, Stevenson, Thompson). It is a good group and it functioned well in the crisis, largely because its diverse viewpoints, intelligences and personality types insured a crossfire competition of ideas.

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At various times the President, his brother, and Secretary McNamara took the lead in getting a consensus. In such a group it is not crucial to get unanimity, but only to canvass all possibilities and consequences. The responsibility for final decision is with the President. After the first tense days of the crisis, say Alsop and Bartlett, the original division between the "hawks" and the "doves"—those who wanted a strike at the missile bases and those who wanted only a blockade—had given way to a "rolling consensus" engineered by McNamara to use the blockade but retain the option of the strike at the bases. "Only Adlai Stevenson dissented from the Excomm consensus," say the authors.

This, one takes it, is the heart of the indictment of Stevenson. Presumably he held out against the strike, even as an option. Even if this is true I cannot see that it is in any sense damning. I have myself not agreed with several of the emphases that Stevenson has expressed in his recent stands, and I should be surprised if the President always agrees with them. But surely this is as it should be. Stevenson is not a military man but a UN man. His UN experience and his whole intellectual history makes him sensitive to the currents of opinion among the representatives of Western Europe, Asia, Africa, Latin America. Why should he have to squeeze out the last drop of the blood of his convictions in order to round out a rolling consensus among 10 or a dozen men who always know that they operate on the thin edge of history?

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Excomm is still at the point where it can consolidate its usefulness as a decision-making body or dribble it away. What will count will not be whether there is always a rolling consensus but whether the members of Excomm and those who (like Stevenson) are called in irregularly feel that they dare express their inner convictions. If after every crisis some dissenter is going to be exposed to national indignation and thrown to the wolf pack because he dared to be soft or hard, hawk or dove, right or wrong, Excomm will be stripped of exactly the crossfire diversity of viewpoint which today gives it vitality. In that case we might as well change its name to Yescomm—the committee of the yes-men.

Let me add that I say this as one who believes that John F. Kennedy is in the White House, where he belongs, and Adlai Stevenson in the UN, where he too belongs. If the men reversed their positions each would be a misfit. Whatever presiding daemon watches over the American destiny has wisely kept Stevenson where his verbal brilliance and his troubled heart and conscience can do the most good, and put Kennedy where his drive and will can give direction to the nation. It is a good pairing. Let's keep it.